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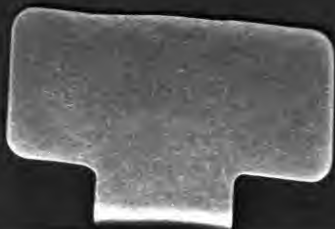
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Lenten meditations

Claude Bosanquet



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LENTEN MEDITATIONS.

BY THE

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LENTEN MEDITATIONS.

MEDITATION I.

ISAIAH liii. 1—3.

“WHO hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?

“For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.

“He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.”

What can be more profitable to my soul at any time than to contemplate the Lord Jesus Christ? What can be more appropriate to the Lenten season than to dwell upon the

sufferings and the work of the Son of God? Accordingly, I invite you, on the Friday mornings to meditate with me upon some portion of this most remarkable chapter, the 53rd of Isaiah. I have often, in reading the history of Israel in the wilderness, been surprised at their murmurings, their idolatries, and their continual unbelief. But I read in the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, 10th chapter, and the 11th and 12th verses, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;" and at least I am taught that I am liable to the same temptations; and perhaps I am to learn that if I had lived under the same circumstances I should have done the same. I have wondered also, and who has not? that the Master Himself should have been treated as He was by His own people; but I read in the 6th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, of those "who crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh;" and in the 10th chapter of that same Epistle, of those that "count the blood of

the covenant, wherewith they were sanctified, an unholy thing, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace." Human nature is ever the same. Let me read Scripture, not so much to see the sins of others, but rather to see my own sinful heart, and what would have been my own sinful conduct.

Here then, in the 1st verse, I observe that Jesus is called the "Arm of the Lord," and I think of many passages in Scripture in which the "Arm of the Lord" is spoken of as indicating His power and greatness; His power to avenge and support. And then in the 2nd verse this "Arm of the Lord" is "as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground," and I am reminded of the 2nd verse of the 4th chapter of Isaiah, "In that day shall the Branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel," where also I see the Deity and Humanity of the Lord; only that in the 4th chapter of Isaiah there may be a reference to a time yet future, while here we have Christ in His humiliation. The Lord Jesus "grew up before Him;" let me connect with this such

passages as Luke ii. 40, 52, John viii. 29, John iv. 34, and Psalm xl. 8, so that at last He could say, "I have glorified Thee on the earth ; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do."¹ "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it."² I find that of some of the Old Testament saints it is said that they "walked with God," or "walked before the Lord." Who has not marvelled at the consistency of Enoch and Noah, and the faith of Abraham ? Who has not admired the character of Moses, Josiah, and Daniel ? but the secret is found in those words to Abraham, "I am the Almighty God ; walk before Me, and be thou perfect."³ No doubt the holiness of the Lord Jesus does not always strike the mind as so remarkable, because it is remembered that He is God. It seems to me sometimes as if Satan may wish to exaggerate the Deity of the Lord, at least to put it so strongly before us that we overlook the humanity. Was Jesus holy, most holy among men ? did He offer a perfect service to God ? It was the holiness of a man like you and me ; while I know Him to be

¹ John xvii. 4.² John xviii. 11.³ Genesis xvii. 1.

very God, worship Him as God, and see in His death, as St. Ignatius phrases it, "the shedding of the blood of God," yet I cannot believe that His divine nature assisted Him in that life of holiness, else how would He be an example to me? No, He grew up before the Lord; it was in that He lived continually unto God, upon God, and in the presence of God, that He was perfect among men. Then let me thus learn to walk; let me see in this the secret of strength.

O my Father, fill me with Thy holy fear; give me to feel that Thine eye is ever on me, and help me ever to walk as before Thee, the Lord my God.

But, 2ndly, while He is "the Arm of the Lord" in power and excellence, and the "tender plant, the root out of the dry ground" (by which His Nazareth residence, or His being Virgin-born, or His springing from the despised and well-nigh extinct House of David, are variously understood), "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with

grief ; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." Beauty attracts us all naturally ; there is no harm in this, since, certainly, it is one of God's gifts. But an immortal being ought to be attracted more by soul-excellence than by beauty of person. First, then, I see here that man is apt to think higher of gifts than of graces. Of the person of the Lord Jesus no representation and even no description remains, for the description given in the fourth century, even if true, is somewhat vague, and is altogether unreliable. I am glad I do not know what my Lord was like, and I scarcely desire to look upon any picture of Christ. The best of men had no personal attractions, and therefore the best of men was passed by, "*despised*" and "*rejected*." Oh, let it teach me to be ever on the watch that I, a poor sinner, do not fall into a similar error. St. John has said, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you."⁴ But by the world the brethren are reckoned as the off-scouring of all things. Jesus was nothing to most people, many would not have turned round to look at Him ; but how differently they spoke

⁴ 1 John iii. 13.

who knew Him. Hear St. Peter saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."⁵ Hear the spouse declaring, "He is chiefest among ten thousand; He is altogether lovely."⁶

O Lord, help me to value men more at their true worth; help me to see Thee in all Thy people; preserve me, O gracious Saviour, from the sin of thus despising Thee.

But again; I find that the Lord, "the well-beloved" of the Father, the Holy One of Psalm xvi., is not only passed by and despised; He is even rejected of men; He is one whom men disliked and positively hated. For He Himself says to them, "Why go ye about to kill Me?" and again, to His disciples, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you."⁷ Not till the light comes are imperfections seen; not till there was a revelation of holiness could men be sensible of their sins; Christ Jesus coming

⁵ John vi. 68, 69.

⁶ Song v. 10, 16.

⁷ John xv. 18.

into the world showed to men where they were and what they were. The Pharisees were told they were blind, all men were told they were wrong, and proud human nature resented this. Christ was not only despised, but hated. Indifference to God is impossible; the natural man hates the Lord; and as the First Commandment is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," the renewed man begins to fulfil it. The Lord was rejected of men—rejected and scorned by the great men of the day; the question was asked, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?"⁸ That is the treatment Christ Jesus still receives at the hands of men; that is what the Gospel will mostly be to the rich and wealthy. Ask yourselves whether you are among the Lord's enemies or the Lord's friends. What your feelings are to His followers is what you are to Christ; for is it not written, "He that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me"?⁹

To conclude, let me look at the treatment

⁸ John vii. 48

⁹ Luke x. 16.

the Master received, and be prepared for the same. The desire for justice is strong within us, every one wishes to be appreciated ; it is a sharp trial to be misunderstood ; it is painful to be disliked. But it is written, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you!"¹ and, "The disciple is not above his master, but every one that is perfect shall be as his master."² Jesus was despised, the Son of God was hated ; shall we care for the world's scorn after this ? shall we even desire its approval ? Jesus grew up before the Lord. Man might scorn, and despise, and hate Him, and even slay Him at last ; but He had the constant sense of the Father's approval, He served the Lord and not the world ; He had the peace which nothing could disturb, and at length committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.

Oh, may God make Himself to me a very reality, so real that nothing shall have any reality in comparison. Oh, may He so bring me to serve Him, to walk before Him ; to live as accountable to Him ; that I may desire nought but His approval. Then shall I be

¹ Luke vi. 26.

² Luke vi. 40.

able to bear bravely on, and, unmoved by the scorn and hatred of the world, shall follow peacefully in the blood-stained footprints of the Master.

MEDITATION II.

ISAIAH liii. 4.

"SURELY He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows : yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."

How am I to know the meaning of these words, as well as of the similar words in verse 3, "A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"? Let me ask of the Lord Jesus Himself, the Sufferer here spoken of, who in Heaven remembers His sufferings on earth ; let me ask Him to show me the meaning, to teach me what He alone really knows. This is a passage which I may expect to understand in old age better than in middle life ; as every year will bring its sorrows with it, so every year will bring the believer into closer communion with the Lord Jesus. What are called the misfortunes of life should be to the

Christian his greatest blessing, for his one¹ desire is to know more of Jesus, and thus he comes to understand Him. "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward;"¹ then how foolish for any one to look for satisfaction and joy here! The Lord Jesus has said, "Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep."² Solemn words are spoken in the parable to him who in this life received his good things. Is all smooth? is every one at peace with me? am I perfectly contented? and are there no thorns in my path? Then let me ask myself, Where is my daily cross? Let me ask whether I am not wanting in faithfulness? Whether I am not ashamed of the Master and His service? The Lord is my Pattern; He shows me what to expect, as He will teach me how to bear it; if my Master was a "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," I must be the same; if "He bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows," I must cultivate sympathy, and "weep with those that weep."

¹ Job v. 7.

² Luke vi. 25.

Lord, if I have made too much of my comforts, mercifully forgive it. Lord, if my treasure is in any way on earth, take it from me, though it make my heart desolate. Lord, if I am turning away from the cross, lay it on me with Thine own hand; only leave me not to myself in any case; be my true and faithful Friend.

What were the sorrows of Jesus that He should be called "a Man of sorrows"? There is a very remarkable passage in the 8th chapter of St. Matthew. The Lord is healing many sick, and St. Matthew says, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses," verse 17. That dear saint has taught me, I think, more of the depth of meaning in the Old Testament than any one else. Similarly also in the 18th of St. John, I read, "Jesus answered, I have told you that I am He: if therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way; that the saying might be fulfilled which He spake, Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost none," verses, 8, 9. Partly, perhaps, in both passages I am to see that Christ was acting, as it were, prophetically, that some spiritual meaning lies beneath His

smallest act. But also I am to see that the words referred to signify more than I should have thought, when He said, "those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition ; that the Scripture might be fulfilled,"³ it even included bodily preservation ; and when it says, " He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows," it includes a reference to all the ills that flesh is heir to—sickness, toil, and daily worries. The life of Jesus shows me that He had the usual annoyances of men—He was hungry, thirsty, weary, just like one of ourselves.

2ndly. There was the sorrow of loneliness. Of Adam it was said by his Maker, "It is not good for the man that he dwell alone ;" the second Adam was the most lonely of all men. The more carefully I read the Gospel history, though it is scarcely ever asserted, the more clear the loneliness of Christ is to me. Witness the foolish questions of His disciples, the dispute carried on who should be the greatest, carried on after the washing of the feet, under the very shadow of the Cross ; or again, the drowsiness of the three favoured

³ John xvii. 12.

disciples on the two special occasions that they were invited to pray with Him. Now, my Lord had a large heart, a loving heart, and a very human heart. Thus He would value sympathy, and would feel the want of love; the more loving He was, the more lonely He would be without love. Yet His heart did not contract, for He could say, "He that sent Me is with Me; the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him;"⁴ and so at the last, "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."⁵ Some of us dread loneliness; we are naturally sociable, and never so happy as when surrounded with friends; and we know that, as life goes on, our friends will die and leave us, and we must be more and more lonely. Some one sighs after love, wants some heart on which to lean, feels it has much love to give, and God has evidently ordered it that that one is to walk through life alone; and perhaps he or she dreads to think of the closing years of life,

⁴ John viii. 29.

⁵ John xvi. 32.

the lonely fireside, and the desolate heart. Oh! let that soul look upon the "Man of sorrows;" here is one more lonely than you can ever be, and yet His heart was warm and loving up to the end.

O Lord, be Thyself the one centre of my love; let me feel Thy friendship; come and fill up every gap in my heart as it is made; make me so to be satisfied in communion with Thee, that I shall bear this trial bravely and to Thine honour.

But what about the sorrow for sin; the shame, the remorse, the bitter regret, and self-loathing? Does the "Man of sorrows" sympathize with me here? for He was perfect and sinless, and in Him was no taint of evil. I read, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."⁶ I read again, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin: that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."⁷ I know that He endured the wrath of God against sin; then He must understand my sufferings as a sinner.

⁶ 1 Pet. ii. 24.

⁷ 2 Cor. v. 21.

And then there is the sorrow and trial that arises from injustice, and in the 3rd to the 5th verse here, that seems to be put specially forward. He was actually suffering for us, labouring for our good ; He had come from heaven altogether for the sake of sinners, and man heaped upon Him opprobrious epithets. He is truth and justice itself—how keenly He must have felt this injustice ! Oh, let me remember the many things the Master has said to me about this, for as surely as I am a follower of Jesus, I must expect to meet with the same. We want to be understood, we naturally desire to have our efforts appreciated ; we look for sympathy and justice especially from those with whom we are brought in contact. You know what the Psalmist has said in the 55th Psalm about his familiar friends ; you know what St. Paul's experience was in his 2nd Epistle to Timothy and the 4th chapter ; when the Master died no one understood Him. I shall be abused, maligned, scandalized ; I shall certainly meet with injustice, when I might look for something different ; the meanness, the coarseness of human nature will thus be manifest to me. What am I

going to do? Shall I grow hard and fierce, and give back scorn for scorn? My God, keep me from this, for I cannot trust myself; let me remember the Lord's words: "They that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Jesus bore it and loved; Jesus prayed for His murderers, and not in vain; many of them were changed. It is written, "If thy enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."⁸ Let me remember that this also is one of the trials for Jesus' sake, and bear it bravely as His disciple.

Thus my Master was a "Man of sorrows;" and with all these varied griefs upon Him, He knew the great trial of low spirits. This you see when you hear Him say, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."⁹ It seems strange He should say that, just when the nobleman was exhibiting such faith, "and when the Galilæans had received Him," but He was contrasting Galilee with Samaria. The same remark applies to that sigh at Decapolis, recorded in Mark vii.:

⁸ Rom. xii. 20.

⁹ John iv. 48.

Decapolis is compared with Syro-Phœnicia, and the same dispiritedness you find directly afterwards at Dalmanutha. Thus Jesus was a "Man of sorrows," and well acquainted with grief; thus His sorrows produced the natural effect of inclining Him to be desponding, and to look at everything in a melancholy way. But He held bravely on His course; He was grave, but not morose; sad, but never cynical; and He had His moments of joy; and He had a settled peace that the world knew not of.

O my Saviour, Thou Man of Sorrows, who knowest, as having experienced it, every grief and every trial that can come upon me; help me to see the Father's hand in all that happens, like Thee to look up and say, "The cup which my Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?"¹ Help me to feel Thy sympathy amidst the keenest injustice; to prove again and again the truth of Thy invitation, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;"² help me to *lean* upon this sympathy, and as Thou didst look onward to the joy set before Thee;

¹ John xviii. 11.

² Matt. xi. 28.

Lenten Meditations.

so raise my thoughts and my expectations continually to heaven ; make heaven to be my home ; help me, like Thyself, to live the pilgrim life here.

MEDITATION III.

ISAIAH liii. 5, 6.

"BUT He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

"O my soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."¹ So I read that the rich fool once said; it is called a parable, but it may have been an incident in real life. And may I not say the same in a spiritual sense? for does not the Lord say, "Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your

¹ Luke xii. 19.

soul delight itself in fatness"?² O my soul, thou hast much stored up for thee in this chapter; hope when thou liest under the burden of sin, sympathy from Him who bore thy griefs and carried thy sorrows, the prospect of endless glory hereafter; O my soul, there are for thee unsearchable riches in Christ.

O Jesus, most loving Saviour, present with me at this moment, help me to meditate on these precious words: I see three great life-truths, of all which I know too little by experience; yet surely I may believe that Thou wilt help me to see more deeply into them: for how must Thou delight to hear a poor sinner saying, "Show me myself, show me Thyself"! Is not this desire born of heaven? is it not a proof that the Spirit is working in the heart of one of thine immortal creatures?

And, first, I am reminded of my sins. It is no use for me to deny that I am a sinner; it is idle for me to combat the doctrine of the depravity of human nature; the teaching of Scripture from one end to the other is perfectly plain upon the subject; such verses as Genesis

² Isaiah lv. 2.

viii. 21, Psalm li. 5, Ephesians ii. 1—3, and the 6th verse in this chapter clearly set forth the lost and ruined condition of every soul. And I do not feel it ; I do not repent ; my sins are ordinarily no burden to me ; now and then perhaps I mourn over them a little ; something may occasionally happen to make me feel that my iniquities are “a sore burden, too heavy for me ;” sometimes I may cry out with the Prophet, “Woe is me ! for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips ;”³ but generally speaking I go through the day very comfortably ; and sometimes even the words of the Confession in the Communion Service seem to express more than I feel. For certainly the loss of a dear friend, and any great temporal trouble, often more affect me than do my daily sins ; how is this to be accounted for ? Surely this verse explains it to me ; for, first of all it says, “All we like sheep have gone astray ;” “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God ;”⁴ “There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not,”⁵ therefore among my friends, relations, or companions,

³ Isaiah vi. 5.⁴ Rom. iii. 23.⁵ Eccles. vii. 20.

there is no one that is not a sinner ; and comparison therefore to my own detriment is not forced upon me. And then the verse goes on, "We have turned every one to his own way ;" oh, how much in those words, "his own way" ! What does it tell me of my own natural perversity ; how does it warn me not to trust my judgment, or conscience, or inclinations ! I can see the faults of others ; my conscience revolts against their sins ; but this natural conscience which ought to have been a help to me, how does it excuse and overlook my own errors ! But I see what is written here, and what an inspired man of God has said, speaking also from his own enlightened experience ; I compare with this the words of St. James, "In many things we offend all ;"⁶ I find St. John saying, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."⁷ And therefore I feel that if my heart does not echo the same, it is a sign of spiritual paralysis ; yet when I aim at anything higher, if, being moved by the Spirit of God I strive after holiness and likeness unto Jesus, then

⁶ James iii. 2.

⁷ I John i. 9.

I soon find myself taking up the language of Romans vii., and saying, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."⁸

Lord Jesus, I see the truth; but the eyes see farther than the feet walk; as I know more than I do, so I believe more than I feel. Oh, this very callousness of mine, this indifference to my own sinfulness, this want of brokenness of spirit, this is one of my trials; I do repent of my very impenitence. O Jesus, who knowest me better than I know myself; Thou art not weary of me, though I have wearied of myself long ago. O Saviour, show me the truth as far as I need to know it about my sinful condition; and make me ever the humblest of the humble; but mercifully preserve me from gloom and despondency.

And here I see also what my sins have done. In the 5th verse it says, "He was wounded for our transgressions;" it might be translated, "He was pierced for our transgressions;" reference being to the pierced hands and side, and perhaps to the pierced

⁸ Rom. vii. 23.

feet. And again I read, "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all;" or it might be translated, "The Lord hath caused to meet on Him the punishment of us all." The sufferings of the Lord Jesus—I have heard about them, and read about them, but what impression do they produce upon me? I sometimes wonder if I ought to feel continually moved to pity as I read what the Lord endured for me. I am not sure about this; there might be sensibility without religious feeling: just as a person sheds tears over a story. I sometimes think that too much stress is laid upon this by the Romanists; I pray Thee, Lord, to instruct me here. But certainly I ought often to meditate upon these sufferings; the language here is very full of meaning; it evidently alludes to mental as well as bodily suffering: and the whole scene in the Garden rises up before me. I must make more of the prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament; my Lord did not often speak of His own feelings during His ministry; I must therefore turn to the Messianic Psalms, such as Psalms xxii., lxix., and lxxxviii.; for there the very heart of Jesus

seems opened to me. Oh, the wondrous love of the Father, that He caused to meet upon His Beloved Son the punishment of us all ! Oh, the wondrous love of my Saviour, that He should endure such sufferings for *me* ; that is why I ought to meditate much upon the sufferings of Jesus ; not that I may be moved to tears of pity, for the Lord said, " Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children," but that I may be brought to love Him more and more, " who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Lord Jesus, who rememberest the shame and the agony of Thine own Cross and Passion ; I pray Thee to take me by the hand, and so lead me in spirit to Gethsemane and Calvary ; O, help me to know a little more about Thy sufferings, that my gratitude and my love may evermore flow out to Thee.

I see myself, then, a great sinner ; I see my Saviour suffering on my behalf, " bearing my sins in His own body on the tree, that I, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness ;"¹ I ask, what is the effect for good to

⁹ Luke xxiii. 28.

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 24.

me of this my Lord's suffering? I read, "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him;" that is, the infliction was upon Him that we might have peace; even as I read in the 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians, and the 5th chapter, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." All have sinned, and the atonement is made for all; the gospel offer is to be made to every creature. It is peace on earth, goodwill towards men; because the Lord has suffered, God as a Father can now wait to be gracious, and in justice can forgive. Peace is offered to me at once; the question is only now as to my willingness to be friends with God; shall I, like a sullen child, refuse to confess my fault and ask for reconciliation; or shall Satan try to obscure from my view this great foundation truth written on every page of God's Word? Again I read, "By His stripes we are healed." Christ Jesus has purchased for me something more than pardon, by His life and death He has procured for me grace now, and glory hereafter. Here there are three great life-truths, too little dwelt upon

by me in time past. I am a sinner by nature, sinning every day of my life ; Christ has been pierced for my transgressions, and crushed for my iniquity ; peace is offered me now, and all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

O Lord Jesus Christ, I humbly thank Thee that Thou has taken pity upon me a poor sinner ; I thank Thee that in these days of doubtful views and uncertain teaching, Thou hast given me here such clear statements of truth. O, help me to hate sin ; make my own besetments manifest to myself ; make me to loathe that which is natural to me. And show me continually more and more clearly how, though I be so vile and guilty, yet for Thy sake my Father pardons me, and offers me perfect healing ; that so I may be humble but happy ; penitent, but believing, and all my life may wash Thy feet with my tears ; and gladly consecrate to Thee all that I have, and all that I am. Amen.

MEDITATION IV.

ISAIAH liii. 7—9.

“HE was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth : He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.

“He was taken from prison and from judgment : and who shall declare His generation ? for He was cut off out of the land of the living : for the transgression of My people was He stricken.

“And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death ; because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth.”

The nature of my Lord's sufferings, and how He bore them, these are for my consideration to-day. As I pause upon these verses, I find that there is some difficulty of

translation. For instance, "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted" may perhaps be better translated, "He was oppressed, and yet He abased Himself." In the 9th verse, again, it is generally agreed that the reading should be "They made His grave with the wicked and with the rich in His death." But the chief difficulty is in the 8th verse; for there are so many ways of translating the words "He was taken from prison and from judgment:" and so also there are three or four ways of explaining the meaning of the expression "Who shall declare His generation?" But of this last I may say that upon the whole it seems best to refer it to the childlessness of the Lord: and this it will be well to remember when I come to meditate on the last verses of the chapter. But all these intricacies of translation I would dismiss now; they may be taken up by me at some other time; to dwell long upon them would hinder the devotional feeling. May the Lord be with me and help me to meditate to my profit on this subject!

Lord, I do confess that I have too often opened the Book of God without prayer; O

make me more and more to feel how, when I ask for light wherewith to understand Thy Word, Thou dost hear and answer my cry.

And, 1st, the injustice of the sentence, and the violence of His enemies are set forth in these verses. There was everything to excite holy indignation; and all the circumstances of that closing scene must have been exquisitely trying to that holy Soul. The little child has a keen sense of what is just; the hardest trials of school arise often through the unfairness and favouritism of the teachers; and how often have I thought to myself that I did well to be angry, because I was unjustly treated. Then again, I find that my Lord is accused of the greatest sins, and branded with the most awful names. He is called "Beelzebub;" He is said to have a devil; He is stigmatized as "a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners;" and oh! to think of all the evil intended in those epithets; and at last He is put to death as one that is guilty of blasphemy. And then again, these are the very people whom He has come first to save. He loved the Jewish people with a special affection;

He had gone about doing good, healing their sick, comforting those in sorrow, and teaching them of the kingdom of God. Even now He lays down His life for them; He dies that they may live. And these people who ought to have honoured Him, to have loved Him, to have devoted themselves to His service; these are the men that hate Him, that murder him. Oh, I see what to expect; I ought to be prepared for anything in the way of injustice, unfairness, and oppression that may come upon me.

Lord Jesus, keep this scene continually before me; and if ever I am thus tried, then graciously point me to the Hall of Caiaphas, and to the judgment-seat at Gabbatha.

I see again what the real character of the world is; I see what it is in its feelings towards the Lord Jesus; and I perceive what its attitude ever is towards the gospel. The world crucified my Saviour; it crucified Him because it hated Him; can I love the world after that? If I do, where is my loyalty and love for my Saviour? Once more I see the love of the Lord Jesus to poor sinners, that He bore all this for their sakes; oh, but I

want to feel more keenly that it was all for *me*. St. Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."¹ St. Paul could not have said, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God," but for those closing words, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou lovest me; and my heart is as cold as a stone towards Thee. Nothing I know will move me to the love Thou demandest from me, except the feeling of this love of Thine for my soul. O help me to feel that my sins crucified Thee, that Thy blood was shed for me individually; send the Holy Spirit especially to instruct me in this great truth; that I may say with thy frail but penitent disciple, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee."²

2ndly, I am to observe how my Lord bore Himself under all this injustice and oppres-

¹ Gal. ii. 20.

² John xxi. 17.

sion. He abased Himself. They oppressed Him, and He bowed His head to receive their insults, "He hid not His face from shame and spitting." And being so humble, more meek than Moses, so meek and lowly in heart that He was among them as one that served, they could not abase Him any lower. Pride was gone in Him, and hence the peace, the calm, settled, abiding peace that possessed His soul.

Lord, I know not what to say about this. This pride of mine is part of my very self. I may think that I have slain it, and I find that it is hydra-headed. I mortify it in some way, I humble myself under some insult; and when I look into my heart I find that the serpent has only retired into an inner chamber of my soul. Lord, I am quite powerless here. Humble, as Thou wert, I despair of ever being, but I will try and keep Thy blessed example before me, and I do hope that at last I shall hate every form of pride; and shall be continually practising humility.

Now my Lord might have avoided all this injustice and suffering. He had often escaped

out of the hands of His enemies before ; even now in the garden He had caused His enemies to fall backward, had healed Malchus's ear, and had spoken of twelve legions of angels whom His Father would give Him. They taunt Him now upon the Cross with His helplessness ; they bid Him come down and they will believe ; and on that Cross He speaks as a King to the dying thief. Holy indignation He did sometimes exhibit ; as in the case of the cavillings about Sabbath observance, and when He vindicated Mary of Bethany. But He does not show this on His own behalf ; He does not resist in the very least ; He is silent, except when He is adjured to speak ; or when He speaks for the warning or comfort of the listeners.

“Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth : keep the door of my lips,”³ what need have I for this prayer ! How much better for my soul it would often be to be silent under unjust accusation ; for how often in vindicating the right I have fallen into sin ! Let the Lord's example urge me to silence ; let me remember how much is said in its praise

³ Psalm cxli. 3.

in the book of Proverbs ; my thoughts, my feelings are beyond myself ; but it is written, " If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." ⁴

And is there to be no vindication of the right ? is the Lord, as a man, to have no ray of comfort ? and is there to be nothing which shall show that some, at least, think differently from the multitude ? " They made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death ;" " At evening-time it shall be light." At the ninth hour, as the sun comes out from the darkness, the cry is uttered, " It is finished." Jesus dies in peace, dies happy. And after death His body does not hang upon the tree, nor is it placed in the sepulchre of the common felons, but it is laid in a new tomb in a rich man's garden. Jesus did not speak in His own defence, He did not ask for the legions of angels ; His only prayer was " Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do." But the Father, who had said, " This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," ⁵ by the wonderful

⁴ James iii. 2.

⁵ Matt. iii. 17.

events of that day, and by the consolation imparted to the human soul of Jesus, showed that He was in the right. David said, "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me;"⁶ David, like the Lord, again and again sets the example of silence and forgiveness and trust in God. Let me learn to leave my cause in the Lord's Hands; even as Michael the Archangel said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke thee." Here, then, I see what the Lord suffered for me, both as my Substitute and my Example. He teaches me what to expect, He shows me how the child of God should bear himself; and He bids me look on to the end, and remember that there is a day coming when all will receive their due.

Blessed Saviour, I am so far behind that I can scarce understand this marvellous conduct of Thine. O help me to remember Thee at all times; help me to have Thy example before me especially in the rough places of life. Make me forgiving, make me gentle and patient as Thou art, and as Thou wouldst have me to be. Help me to feel

⁶ Psalm xxxv. 1.

that this will be an acceptable sacrifice in Thy sight ; for the smallest act done to please Thee by one of Thy children, shall not go unnoticed. And, O, enable me to put my whole cause into the Father's Hands, and to wait in patience and confidence until He shall see fit either in this world or in the next to make the righteousness of His people as clear as the light, and their just dealing as the noonday.

MEDITATION V.

ISAIAH liii. 10—12.

"YET it pleased the Lord to bruise Him ; He hath put Him to grief : when thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.

He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied : by His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many ; for He shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong ; because He hath poured out His soul unto death : and He was numbered with the transgressors ; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

What is it that I want to make me perfectly happy? what is that living water of

which the dear Saviour spoke to the woman of Samaria? That woman on that day came to the knowledge of the gift of God, and who it was that spoke to her; she found the Christ, and she with others cried over the city, "We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."¹ And that is what I need to make me perfectly happy, to make me for ever at rest: let me know that the Lord Jesus is *my* Saviour, and the thirst in my soul is quenched. I am not always equally sensible of this longing: I do not always desire this peace with God through Jesus Christ my Lord. But still in coldest moments and even when the world or sin has the greatest hold upon me, it does but need for me to look into my heart, and I become conscious that so long as I am at enmity with God, an unpardoned sinner, or even though pardoned not aware of it, there can be no peace for me. Now, in looking into these three verses, I might very well meditate for a length of time upon every sentence; but I will now select four thoughts upon which I will fasten my attention.

¹ John iv. 42.

Jesus, I know that Thou must wish me to look earnestly on Thee: I cannot please Thee better than by such meditation: for hast Thou not said, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved"? and didst Thou not say to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life"?² Oh, then, help me to lay to heart these four blessed truths: help me to feel them to be great realities; and grant that the thoughts which I have drawn from this chapter may not pass away when I close the book, but rather may they sink deep into my heart and influence my life continually.

And first I read that "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him:" and again, at the end of the same verse, "The pleasure, the goodwill of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." Earlier in the chapter I have read, "He was bruised for our iniquities;" and here it is, "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him." "Surely He hath borne our griefs," it says, verse 4; and here it is, "He hath put Him to grief."

² John iii. 14, 15.

Again I read, "His life was taken away;" here it is, "When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin;" or it may be, "When He shall make His soul" or "When His soul makes itself an offering for sin." I see here, again, what I have noticed before in this chapter, the wilfulness and wickedness of man permitted, overruled, and restrained, according to the will of God. Oh, how safe may every child of God feel in his Father's keeping! for did not the Lord say, and a very remarkable passage it is, "Ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for My Name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish"?³ When men are most wicked and licentious, they are still under the government of God: let me not forget that magnificent passage in the 37th of Isaiah, where God says to Sennacherib, "Because thy rage against Me, and thy tumult, is come up into Mine ears, therefore will I put My hook in thy nose, and My bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee

³ Luke xxi. 16, 18.

back by the way by which thou camest." Nay, I may even learn the same lesson from Satan himself, when he says to the Lord, "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not Thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?"⁴ And my Master never lost sight of this; "The Scripture," He said, "must be fulfilled;" "The things concerning Me have an end;" and to Pilate, "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above."⁵ Only let me be right, only let the will of God be my chief delight, and then all will be well, and everything that happens to me will be a needs-be for the good of my soul.

"It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief—the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." God is righteous, "God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," and the Cross of the Lord Jesus makes this most manifest to me. But "God is love." "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," and He said of the Lord Jesus, "This is My

⁴ Job i. 9, 10.

⁵ John xix. 11.

beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”⁶ Did it please the Lord to bruise His beloved Son? did the goodwill of God prosper in the hands of Christ? Then I see how earnestly the Father longs for my salvation: and as I read this chapter I seem to hear Him saying, “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”⁷ And when I read the whole of Scripture, I see the same continually—how God my Father waits to be gracious, and delights to pardon and bless His creatures. Satan belied the Lord God in the garden, he instilled into man’s soul hard thoughts of his Maker, and he spoke all too effectually; for, doubting His love, our first parents first ate of the forbidden fruit, and then were afraid to confess their sin and ask for pardon. And so ever since, man’s natural thoughts of God have been wrong: either he has conceived of God as all merciful, and all unjust in blind fondness, even as we read in Psalm l., “I held my

⁶ Matt. iii. 17.

⁷ Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

tongue, and thou thoughtest wickedly that I am even such an one as thyself ;" or else he sides with the indolent servant in the parable, who is represented as saying to his Master, "I knew thee, that thou art an austere man." The Cross shows me the justice, and the Cross shows me the wonderful love of God. How, then, can I doubt God's willingness to receive me, on my crying 'to Him for pardon? His love caused Him to give His dear Son to be the propitiation for my sins: and now when I cry for mercy because of the sacrifice of Jesus, I appeal to the justice and righteousness of my God.

O my Father, I know how often I have thought and spoken hard things of Thee. I know that, being myself so unholy and sinful, I naturally shrink from the thought of Thy perfect holiness; and my poor finite mind cannot comprehend Thy greatness, and can only take in one thought at a time. I pray Thee help me day by day to understand Thee better: I beseech Thee show me Thy glory, and proclaim to me Thy great Name; and bring me to rejoice both in Thy perfect righteousness and Thy perfect goodness.

And then I read, "He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days ;" and in the next verse, "He shall see of the travail of His soul : " or as perhaps it may be translated, "after the travail of His soul He shall see and be satisfied." In the 8th verse, I understand "who shall declare His generation" of the childlessness of my Saviour : but here a seed is given to Him : and I am at once reminded of Psalm xxii. 30, "A seed shall serve Him ; it shall be counted to the Lord for a generation." Perhaps it may be well to remember, in connexion with this, certain expressions in Isaiah lvi., where God comforts those that had no hope of offspring. I have sometimes thought that the prophet Daniel may have read that passage in Isaiah with great comfort to himself. Let lonely souls and let those that have to pass through this world without knowing all the family joys granted to some, remember these two places. Jesus suffered and entered into His glory : and Isaiah here, like all the prophets, foretells the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. "Therefore," God says, "I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with

the strong." And here I am pointed forward to the glories of the Resurrection, and to the time when what He refused from Satan (which Satan could never really have given Him, for he lied to Him as to our first parents) shall be given Him by the Father, when "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever."⁸ And so He sets me an example, and teaches me to bear the cross; for only if we suffer with Him shall we reign with Him. I see every kind of suffering, bodily and mental; I see shame, injustice, ignominy, every insult heaped upon the holiest of men; and He bore it in meekness, and He triumphed in the Cross. Then I must not be surprised at any trial of the same kind that in an infinitely lesser degree may come upon me; and I learn that the more I bear myself meekly, following in His footsteps, the more shall I know of His glory by participation, when He grants to those that overcome to sit with Him on His throne.

Lord Jesus, help me to say from my heart,
"Slay my pride, mortify my self-love, kill

⁸ Rev. xi. 15.

self in me, and reign supreme in this poor soul of mine."

Lastly, "He made intercession for the transgressors," or, as I am told, it may be read, "He maketh intercession for the transgressors." A dying Saviour has procured my reconciliation; but a living Saviour pleads my cause in heaven, and is ready to help me in every time of need; "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them."⁹ I do not think that I meditate enough upon the perpetual and all-prevailing intercession of my Lord. I think a great deal too much about the efficacy of my prayers; and because I have had liberty in expressing myself in prayer, I may sometimes have been too well satisfied: and on the other hand, I may have been unduly disturbed when I uttered but a stammering prayer. I am sure that I have often said "for Jesus Christ's sake" without much thinking of its precious meaning. Yet I read, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me,"¹ and I

⁹ Heb. vii. 25.

¹ John xiv. 6.

know that in reality no prayer of mine can ever come before the Throne, unless the Son of God offers it for me. I do resolve to think more upon and to lean more entirely on the mediation of my Saviour. "He maketh intercession for the transgressors;" when on earth, He said, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,"² and, again, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost;"³ and now in heaven I see that He preserves the same gracious bearing to poor sinners: my sinful condition excited His compassion once; and He pities me with infinite compassion now. But my time is exhausted: and I must not remain longer in meditation; if I have thought upon any of these verses aright, may the Lord see the fruit of it in my life.

O God the Father, I do thank Thee for that Thou didst give Thy dear Son for such a poor sinner as me:—from the bottom of my heart I would ever praise Thee for that Thou wast well-pleased in the sufferings of my Lord. O, accept Him for me, and look upon me in Him. O Jesus, most gracious and tender

² Matt. ix. 13.

³ Luke xix. 10.

Saviour, who hast borne all that I deserve :
bring me indeed to hate my sins, to loathe
myself, to trust implicitly in Thy finished
work, to rest upon Thy perpetual mediation,
and to love Thee for that Thou hast done for
poor sinners. O God the Holy Ghost, touch
this cold heart of mine that it may feel sin and
rejoice in pardon. O blessed Spirit, pour the
light upon my blind eyes, show me my Lord
dying on the Cross in my stead, pleading ever
in heaven for me ; and bring me to a living
faith in the Lord Jesus, a faith that shall work
by love, a faith that overcometh the world.
And to Thee, O Father, Son, and Holy
Ghost, three Persons in the one Godhead, for
the glorious work of redemption, be praise
and thanksgiving and adoration for ever and
ever.

THE END.

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